

Facilities Repair and Renewal Team upgrades Service Processing Center in Puerto Rico

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While it's not unusual for Installation Support and Programs Management Directorate's Facilities Repair and Renewal Division to upgrade facilities, this is the first time the team has worked with the Department of Homeland Security.

In the past, FRR has worked traditionally with customers from the Army, Navy, Air Force and the National Guard. According to Michael Murphy, FRR program manager, working with a new customer such as DHS can be very advantageous for the Center because FRR has been able to support customers that other programs like Utility Monitoring and Control Systems and Electronic Security Systems have brought in.

"By bringing in new customers, it not only provides opportunity for your program, but opportunities for other programs. DHS is a somewhat new agency that was established at the end of 2002; they do not have a construction support branch like USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) is for the U.S. Army. We have been able to step in to help fill this role for DHS," Murphy said.

Under the terms of the new \$2 million contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, FRR is completing several task orders to improve safety and other standards for DHS detainees at San Juan, Puerto Rico's Aguadilla Service Processing Center.

Raul Alonso, the FRR project manager for the site, has been working closely with Marc Reynolds, the DHS project manager at Aguadilla, to make sure the necessary upgrades to the facility will help them stay in compliance with current environmental health and safety standards.

Alonso said he wears two hats, performing PM functions for Huntsville Center Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity contracts and as the PM forward for the Engineering and Construction Support Office. There are various Corps of Engineers PM forwards across the nation assigned to customs border patrol sectors that perform this function. Alonso is acting as the USACE PM forward for the Ramey, Puerto Rico, and Miami customs border patrol sector regions.

Alonso is fluent in Spanish, and said this can be an asset in an area where a majority of the island is Spanish speaking only.

Reynolds said DHS wants to make sure that men and women detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement are being afforded the required levels of healthcare, safety and humane treatment.

The team will upgrade current operational standards to ensure the safety and security of detainees at the Aguadilla facility. These upgrades include installing a fire suppression system and replacing a security perimeter fence. Installing the fence was among the first tasks to be completed.

In Puerto Rico, suspects are found on nearby bordering islands and then brought to Aguadilla for processing.

"In the past, an abandoned and dilapidated fence was all that separated detainees from the rest of the population," Alonso said. "The new security perimeter fence consists of razor and concertina wire, and its purpose is to deter detainees from trying to escape."

The team also has taken an active role in remodeling the facility with both interior and exterior upgrades. These upgrades include adding perimeter lighting, upgrading detainee restrooms, reconfiguring the electrical system and replacing an old roof according to current industry standard.

Alonso said his PM forward duties entail facilitating and coordinating the various projects at his assigned CBP sectors with other Corps offices in Jacksonville, Fla.; Fort Worth, Texas; Savannah, Ga.; and Mobile, Ala.

According to Reynolds, the Corps has played an important role in the mission of homeland security, especially in light of recent terrorism threats around the globe.

“The Army Corps of Engineers has been very helpful in assisting Customs and Border Protection with our numerous projects in Puerto Rico,” Reynolds said. “The knowledge and contract oversight has helped us stay on schedule with the ultimate goal to provide the facilities necessary for CBP to perform our mission in protecting our homeland.”

Murphy and Alonso agree this new contract illustrates the FRR team’s ability to provide a wide range of support to non-traditional customers.

“We want to get the message out there that we (FRR) can do these type projects for other agencies,” they said.